

Book Review: Maxwell, J.F. 2006. **Vascular Flora of Ko Hong Hill, Songkla Province, Thailand.** Thai Studies in Biodiversity No. 6, Biodiversity Research and Training Centre, Bangkok, Thailand. pp.472. Price: US\$9.80 or 350 Baht.

This attractive and inexpensive volume includes introductory chapters on the ecology of Ko Hong Hill, a small low hill in the Haad Yai District, peninsular Thailand. The main body of the text includes keys and descriptions of the families, genera and 637 species of vascular plants found there, references, and some line drawings and colour photographs. There is a dearth of information on the flora of southern Thailand so this volume is a welcome contribution.

The great strength of the book lies in author's first-hand knowledge of Ko Hong Hill, the meticulous collections he makes, and the care with which they are identified. This makes for accurate and detailed descriptions. The families are arranged in a natural order, which facilitates checking identification. The descriptions are obviously based on author's own observations: they are detailed and accurate and include information often lacking in floras, such as unripe and ripe fruit colours. The inclusion of local names will make the work more accessible to Thai users. During the course of the project one new species, *Barringtonia rimata* Chant., was discovered. It is indeed a solid piece of original work.

In addition, it should appeal to a wider audience than those interested in the flora of peninsular Thailand. The locality has been disturbed in the past so its flora includes many of the widespread secondary forest species from most stages in succession. This means that the selection of species is relevant throughout, not only Thailand, but the region. In this respect the key to the 130 families is particularly useful as rather few references include this basic aid. Being based on the author's own experience, it is practical and straightforward to use.

In some cases, the author shows a reluctance to use current names so *Syzygium* still appears as *Eugenia*, *Chromolena* as *Eupatorium* and *Spermacoce* as *Borreria*, *Dianella* (Hemerocallidaceae) is still included in the Liliaceae and Dracaenaceae as Agavaceae.

While the colour photographs are useful and enhance the attractiveness of the book, the line drawings are sketchy and do not include details of inflorescences and flowers, and why are they bunched together at the end of the book instead of being placed next to the description of the species in the text?

One serious error is that the Gesneriaceae is missing from the text (although it is referred to in the Index) and this has resulted in errors in the

Index in page numbers of families close to where the Gesneriaceae should have been. Other small errors include repeating Figure 21 twice and the reference to Maxwell (1983) on page 289 being missing from the References. Can Maxwell produce a book without including a Maxwellism? Who but Maxwell (p. 134) would describe differences of opinion on genera limits in terms of 'outrageously taxonomically brutalized', and some people consider taxonomy boring - in some families it certainly sizzles!

This book is strongly recommended, not only to Thai students and professionals, but also those in the Indo-Chinese region, who need to identify plants. The Thai flora numbers over 8,000 species, far too large to enable the beginner to begin to tackle naming plants and, in any case, many families have not yet been revised for the Thai Flora Project. Maxwell's book is therefore an excellent introduction, as well as serving as a basic reference. It deserves to be widely used. It is available from BRT Secretariat, 5th Floor, NSTDA Building, 73/1 Rama VI Road, Rajdhevee, Bangkok 10400, Thailand.

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